

Statement of the Honorable Tim Bishop
H.R. 6138 – Extending the Higher Education Act
September 27, 2006

Mr. Speaker, this Congress is starting to sound more like a broken record than a deliberative body. Almost three months to the day, I stood in this exact spot and spoke on the extension to the Higher Education Act, as I have done for the past four extensions. Each time hoping that it would be the last short-term measure we needed to pass before we finally produce an improved, bipartisan and long-overdue reauthorization bill that reflects the best interests of America's college students.

I now rise with a different hope, and even stronger convictions. It is now my hope that the current flawed version of the Higher Education Act expires, and that during the next session of Congress, under a new majority, we again address the HEA and truly make it about increasing access and affordability.

Recently, the Secretary's Commission on the Future of Higher Education released its final report on the status of post-secondary education. That report highlighted the dire need for increased Federal aid in the form of Pell Grants. It is puzzling that the Commission would release its findings on increasing access and affordability after the House has addressed its version of the HEA and at the end of this budget cycle, when it's too late this year to help students afford a college education.

I can only hope that the Secretary is planning on briefing Congress on the Commission's findings and that she would respect this body enough to push for legislative remedies rather than implementing the commission's recommendations through negotiated rule-making. I believe that what the Secretary has deemed as a "comprehensive strategy for postsecondary education that will meet the needs of America's future" deserves Congressional consideration. Otherwise, it's an abrogation of our oversight responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, I might vote for the extension that we are considering here today, but I do not support the direction and actions of this Congress as it relates to higher education. We must do more to ensure that every qualified student has the chance to go to college. I yield back the balance of my time.